United Nations E/2010/62

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 May 2010

Original: English

Substantive session of 2010
New York, 28 June-2 July 2010
Item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda*
High-level segment: annual ministerial review

Letter dated 6 May 2010 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

Attached herewith is the national report of the Netherlands on progress towards the achievement of the internationally agreed goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, for the annual ministerial review to be held during the high-level segment of the 2010 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Council, under item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Herman **Schaper**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* E/2010/100.

10-35455 (E) 280510

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Annex to the letter dated 6 May 2010 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

Voluntary national report of the Netherlands

Part A

Summary

1. The Netherlands warmly welcomes the attention to gender equality during this annual meeting of the Economic and Social Council. Fifteen years after the fourth Conference at which the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were signed and 10 years after the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, it is clear that much has been achieved and important progress has been made. The promotion of gender equality is one of the most powerful forces of change. Through gender equality the achievement of many social and economic goals of today can be accelerated. So we can move beyond the "why" of gender equality and can focus on the "how". However, at the same time real changes in policies have not been realized. Goal 3 and Goal 5 still remain the Millennium Development Goals where least progress is made. Gender mainstreaming, in vogue at the turn of the millennium, has too often resulted in gender "away streaming". We have to show that the future of humanity lies with the improvement of gender equality and the active empowerment of women. The challenge is to prove that this does not remain at the level of good intentions, but that real and sustainable change can come out of it.

2. Consequently, considerable energy is needed time and again at all levels to justify interventions designed to reach aims and objectives that were agreed upon internationally years ago. Over the last years, several new initiatives have been taken to break through the image of "gender fatigue". The challenge is to show that these are not mere words, but that real and sustainable change can come out of it.

3. More is needed to get to a new level and make real progress. Goals can be met provided there is a combination of political will, leadership and commitment at the highest level, expertise, a clear policy and adequate funding. For this reason the Netherlands has identified gender equality as a core objective of government policy. Active monitoring of these elements takes place and is reported to parliament. The challenge is to keep this spirit alive and to broaden it internationally.

4. In the Netherlands, since 2007 a renewed interest in gender equality, both at the domestic as well as the global level, has emerged. Domestically, first of all the focus lies on increasing the labour force participation of women: because of the high percentage of Dutch women working part-time, women in the labour force in full-time equivalents is one of the lowest in Europe and only 45 per cent of Dutch women are economically independent. Secondly, special attention is given to women and girls from ethnic minority groups and the specific difficulties they have to fully participate in Dutch society. Thirdly, there is a focus on combating domestic violence against women and girls, sexual violence, trafficking, honour crimes and female genital mutilation.

5. Internationally, the Dutch gender equality policy is structured according to the operational framework of the United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. Seven areas of intervention are identified: post-primary education for girls; promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights; investing in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens; guaranteeing women's and girls' property and inheritance rights; eliminating gender inequality in employment; increasing political participation of women; and finally combating violence against women. Special attention is given to the issue of women and peace and security: in 2007 a National Action Plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was launched. The renewed attention to international gender issues has led to additional investments: more than €300 million extra has been committed. About half of this was invested in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and combating maternal mortality and €70 million was invested in a new Millennium Development Goal 3 fund, that supports women's empowerment activities worldwide.

6. The enhancement of policy focus on gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights is embedded in a set of policy priorities in Dutch development cooperation policy. The Millennium Development Goals are at the heart of this policy. The leading principle in policy implementation is the notion that attainment of the Millennium Development Goals is not a mere responsibility of the Minister for development cooperation, but a matter for all stakeholders in society: all ministries, the private sector and the society as a whole.

7. This report provides an overview of Dutch development cooperation policies and the four priority themes that have been identified on the basis of an assessment of the progress on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. As a result Dutch development cooperation is focused on security and development, economic growth and equity, climate, sustainability and energy and gender equality. This report is not intended to give an exhaustive account of Dutch development cooperation, but is highly focused on Dutch policy towards gender equality.

Overview of Dutch development cooperation policy

8. Development cooperation and human rights form two key pillars of the Netherlands foreign policy. The Netherlands is one of the few OECD/DAC-donors that spend 0.8 per cent of GDP on development cooperation (ODA for 2009 amounted to €4.6 billion). The Government placed the Millennium Development Goals at the centre of its international policy. A Cabinet project (Project 2015) was designed for the promotion of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This gave an important boost to efforts to find new partners and approaches within development, in the form of the so-called Millennium Agreements. These agreements include public-private partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders throughout society, including the private sector, knowledge institutes, universities and non-governmental organizations and illustrate the broad public involvement in the issue of development.

9. In October 2007 the policy letter *Our Common Concern: Investing in Development in a Changing World* was presented to the Dutch parliament. A political approach to development cooperation lies at the heart of the policy letter.

This takes the form of a heightened focus on local processes of accountability, human rights and equity.

10. Based on a scan of the progress on the Millennium Development Goals and broad consultations with civil society, four themes were identified on which efforts were to be stepped up:

A. Security and development

11. Without a more effective international effort, the Millennium Goals will not be attained in conflict-affected countries and threats to human rights and the international rule of law will remain. Support to conflict-affected countries is in the interest of human security, but also serves an enlightened self-interest to combat global instability that undermines regional and national security. This policy is implemented mainly through multilateral organizations and entails support geared to improving the security situation in those countries, State building and development. An important Dutch concern is to ensure that socio-economic programmes in those countries also focus on the furtherance of gender equality in accordance with the action plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

B. Economic growth and equity

12. Economic growth is often considered to be the driving force behind development. However, economic growth on its own is not enough to establish long-term development and to structurally reduce poverty. In order to achieve this, economic growth must be broad-based, linked to policies that reduce social and economic inequality. Dutch development policy aims to support both growth and equity. It pursues an integrated approach by focusing on several levels and areas of policy, with a special focus on the poor. In this, the business climate is of great importance and special attention is given to public sector development (macro-economic policy and good governance) and private sector development (development and improving access to markets, financial sector development, infrastructure and skills and knowledge).

C. Sustainability, climate and energy

13. In response to different crises related to environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, climate change and a threatening shortage of energy supplies, sustainable development, renewable energy and adaptation to climate change have been put on top of the Dutch agenda. The Netherlands supports developing countries in the sustainable management of their natural resources, in the provision of access to reliable, clean and renewable sources of energy, and in the adaptation to and mitigation of climate change. Its continued commitment to provide 50 million people with access to safe water and improved sanitation by 2015 constitutes an important contribution to the health, dignity and well-being of citizens and the environment which they depend on.

D. Equal rights and opportunities for women, and sexual and reproductive health and rights

14. This theme, being the thematic focus of the report, is dealt with in part B.

15. In order to increase the focus and effectiveness of the bilateral programme the number of partners has been reduced over the years. The remaining 40 partner countries were categorized into one of three profiles: (1) accelerated achievement of Millennium Development Goals; (2) security and development; and (3) broad-based relationship. The development relationship with seven countries will be phased out by the end of 2011.

16. *Profile 1: Accelerated achievement of Millennium Development Goals*. The Dutch embassies in these countries have been asked to focus their programme more sharply, partly in response to the European Union Code of Conduct. Existing agreements, such as those laid down in a joint assistance strategy, will continue to be respected. Scope also exists for deploying general or sectoral budget support, providing this is justified by the track record (internal analytical tool).

17. *Profile 2: Security and development*. Here Dutch assistance is structured around four basic interventions, namely, humanitarian aid geared to providing basic services; support of good governance and human rights (including transitional justice); support for security sector reforms to ensure basic security; and support for socio-economic reconstruction. In 2008 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a Fragile States and Peacebuilding Unit to provide support. The unit works closely with embassies, other Dutch ministries, and national and international partners.

18. *Profile 3: Broad-based relationship*. As the name implies, relationships with countries in this profile will be broad-based, with the focus eventually moving away from development cooperation. The aim here is to limit bilateral input to no more than two sectors/themes.

19. In line with the policy priorities that were set in *Our Common Concern* we had to rethink the way we execute our policies and this reflection resulted in the "Modernization Agenda for International Cooperation 2.0" which was presented by the Minister for Development Cooperation in 2008. Development cooperation is set in a changing world that demands coherent policies on global issues and a maximum effort for effectiveness. The Netherlands is a leading donor on policy coherence for development. Memorandums were written together with other ministers on migration and development and on agriculture, rural economic development and food security. Policy memorandums on fragile States, multilateral aid and civil society organizations have also been published in the spirit of this modern Development Cooperation 2.0 in order to increase the openness, policy coherence for development and synergy in the Dutch development programme.

Cooperation with multilateral organizations

20. A policy letter setting out Dutch views on multilateral development cooperation was published in 2009. It concludes that global problems like the financial crisis, the food crisis and the climate crisis emphasize the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation. All these factors have prompted the Netherlands to step up its multilateral development cooperation effort over the coming years. The Netherlands is a strong supporter of United Nations reform and focuses its efforts on achieving a system of effective and efficient multilateral cooperation that reflects the new international environment and the changing needs of developing countries. Multilateral development institutions must increasingly become the preferred channel, on the strict condition that they operate effectively and

efficiently. The most relevant and best-performing institutions will be rewarded more systematically than before with ODA contributions and less earmarking.

Cooperation with Dutch civil society

21. The Netherlands is a strong supporter of civil society organizations because we are convinced that real change can only come from within societies. A total of 22 per cent of all ODA is channelled through those organizations. In 2009 a major shift was established in our funding system for Dutch non-governmental organizations. Based on a broad policy dialogue with civil society organizations a policy memorandum was written on working with civil society. The essence of the memorandum is to ensure better complementarity with our bilateral programme in partner countries and organizing cooperation around specific priority themes. In order to establish this modernization of the NGO-funding the requirement was imposed for the new co-funding system (starting in 2011) that a minimum of 60 per cent of the funding should be spent in Dutch partner countries. Furthermore, Dutch non-governmental organizations were asked to write funding proposals in cooperation with each other around specific themes to establish alliances of civil society organizations in order to generate more coherence and coordination in joint efforts.

Implementing the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: increasing our impact at field level

22. The Netherlands strongly supports the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action as guiding principles for improving the delivery and impact of aid. It does so by participating actively in the OECD Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and advocating the principles at country level. In 2009 the Netherlands finalized and made public the Netherlands action plan for the implementation of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda, which will guide the implementation for the coming years. Videoconferences were held with embassies in partner countries with which the Netherlands entertains a long-term development relationship and that took part in the monitoring of the Paris Declaration. At those conferences, a large number of embassy and headquarters participants discussed the constraints and opportunities for moving further on the aid effectiveness agenda. This resulted in country-specific priority-setting on the one hand and a number of actions for headquarters level on the other. The actions retained aim at (a) supporting our partner countries in achieving their Paris commitments, (b) extra efforts for improving our own performance (at embassy or headquarters level), and (c) efforts to better connect headquarters and field level, both within our own organization as well as through interaction with other agencies.

Part B

Gender equality: "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women"

Introduction

1. The Netherlands is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the General Assembly in 1979. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reviewed the fifth progress report of the Netherlands in February 2010, halfway through the implementation of the emancipation policy 2008-2011. A summary of the policy is presented in this report, with a focus on the international dimension.

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Netherlands

2. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is of paramount importance for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment globally. State parties are legally bound to implement its provisions and can hold each other accountable. The Netherlands submitted its fifth progress report covering the period 2005 to 2008 on 30 June 2008. The reaction of the Committee was mixed.

3. The Netherlands was commended for its support of women's rights organizations and for incorporating a gender approach throughout its development cooperation programme. The Committee appreciated the initiatives undertaken nationally to combat domestic violence, female genital mutilation and honour crimes as well as discrimination based on sexual orientation. Finally, the Committee praised the creation of a Human Trafficking Task Force.

4. It was disappointed however in the limited follow-up to previous recommendations, in particular concerning advocacy for the Convention, its Optional Protocol and the previous concluding observations of the Committee. It also advised the Kingdom of the Netherlands[1] to design a national strategy to implement the Convention. Full implementation of the Convention is required to reach the Millennium Development Goals in the Netherlands. The Committee also urged the Netherlands to report on progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Finally, the Committee expressed its hope that the Netherlands would continue as global leader in the promotion of the human rights of women and gender equality.

2. Netherlands gender policy 2008-2011

5. Since 2007, a renewed interest in gender equality, at both the domestic and the global level, has emerged. The national gender policy, which in the Netherlands is called "emancipation policy", has been laid out in the governmental policy paper *More Opportunities for Women, Emancipation Policy 2008-2011*. Contributions by

[1] Consisting of the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

the different ministries to its implementation are made as transparent and verifiable as possible. In 2010 each ministry will send a midterm review to Parliament outlining results obtained during the period 2008-2010 and exploring new opportunities. The midterm review will form the basis for the gender policy of the next Cabinet. The current policy is focused on the following themes:

2.1. Labour force participation of women

6. In the Netherlands female participation in the labour force is one of the highest in Europe. However, Dutch women mostly work part time: 31 per cent work less than 20 hours per week.[2] Therefore, the participation of Dutch women in the labour force in full-time equivalents is one of the lowest in Europe. The Dutch "one-and-a-half" culture, whereby men tend to work full time and women part time, is difficult to change. One of the consequences is that in 2007 only 45 per cent of the female population aged 15 to 64 earned enough to support themselves, compared to 70 per cent of the male population. During the past three years the Dutch Government has made a concerted effort to reverse this situation.

7. Financial incentives in the fiscal sphere have been established, making it more profitable for women to re-enter the labour market or expand their working hours. The Government has initiated a task force, Part-time Plus, to stimulate women working less than 24 hours per week to increase their number of working hours. Recent data indicates a modest increase in female labour participation rates, from 55 per cent in 2003 to 61 per cent in 2008.

8. The Government stimulates female entrepreneurship in particular, for example through the setting up of a special microcredit facility. Female participation in international trade missions is set to increase from 10 per cent to 20 per cent. Another challenge consists of combining work with childcare responsibilities. It requires flexibility in working hours, increased teleworking, more parental leave, better childcare quality and arrangements for informal care and volunteer work.

9. Female talent is not utilized to its full potential. In the Dutch parliament 43 per cent of the seats are held by women. However, in the private sector, but also in universities, the percentage of women in higher management positions is lagging behind in comparison to other parts of the world. In 2008 more than 50 organizations, in the public as well as in the private sector, voluntarily signed a charter called Talent to the Top. Participating organizations commit themselves to develop and/or implement a clear strategy to promote career opportunities for women and to increase the percentage of women in management positions at the level of Board of Directors. At this moment more than 100 organizations have signed the charter, including the national Government, universities and teaching hospitals. The number is still increasing. In 2007, the total income of women amounted to only 56 per cent of the total income of men. This percentage is unchanged from 2003.[3] Recent statistics concerning the wage gap between men and women indicate that women earn 20.8 per cent less than men in the Netherlands, whereas globally this percentage amounts to 16.5 per cent.[4] The Government is also committed to ending the existing wage gap between men and women.

[2] Source: www.e-quality.nl.

[3] Source: www.cbs.nl.

[4] Source: www.loonwijzer.nl.

2.2. Women and girls from ethnic minority groups

10. Ethnic minority women constitute 10 per cent of the female population of the country. Despite tremendous improvements over the years, there are still too many first-generation migrant women who do not have an adequate command of the Dutch language and lower educational levels than Dutch women at large. They do not fully participate in Dutch society. The Government encourages these women to take advantage of their options and possibilities. The 1001 Strengths Programme was designed in 2007 to get 50,000 women from ethnic minorities involved in paid or voluntary work. The use of female and male role models is employed to stimulate people to explore and use their options and opportunities. Men and fathers are encouraged to join in.

2.3. Security for women and girls

11. Domestic violence against women and girls, sexual violence, trafficking of women and girls, honour crimes and female genital mutilation has priority attention. The Government aims to prevent incidences and reduce numbers. In order to do this, enhancement of necessary professional expertise is an important requirement. As part of the prevention agenda, interventions have also been designed to prepare boys and girls to defend themselves through recognizing and dealing with unsafe situations and to teach them how to deal with each other in a responsible manner. It includes attention to the impact of the sexualization of society on boys and girls. Policy interventions have been designed to counteract the activities of so-called lover boys, who manipulate girls to prostitute themselves. The Government also continues interventions to lower the teenage pregnancy rates and to support teenage mothers. Gender equality needs to be promoted from a young age. Youth organizations play a special role in promoting gender equality.

2.4. International gender policy

12. The Netherlands continues to be concerned about ongoing gender discrimination globally, in all countries and across all sectors. It is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and subscribes to internationally agreed upon agenda like the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Millennium Development Goals (2000).

13. The Dutch Government reconfirmed its commitments to this agenda in the context of Project 2015 in 2007. This project aims at creating an optimal Dutch contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, from the perspective that this is the responsibility of all stakeholders in the public and private sector. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the overall responsibility for the coordination of the international efforts of the Government in this respect. The rights and opportunities for women and girls (Goal 3 and Goal 5) are given a prominent place, not only in development policy but in integrated foreign policy as a whole. Addressing gender concerns globally encompasses more than meeting Goals 3 and 5. The Netherlands has also decided to contribute to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) concerning women and peace and security and to focus on gender issues in all areas of foreign policy.

3. Overview of the international gender agenda

14. Much has been achieved over the past decades in terms of standards and international policy guidelines. But looking at the daily reality of the lives of many women, it has to be concluded that this is by no means enough. Our focus on gender equality is based on both a human rights perspective and the objective to increase women's opportunities. They are inextricably linked: women's rights without opportunities will not bring closer equal rights, nor will opportunities lead to results when women do not have basic rights.

15. Apart from the paragraph in the Emancipation Policy 2008-2011, the international gender policy of the Netherlands, which is outlined below, has been incorporated and elaborated on in the following policy documents:

- *Our Common Concern: Investing in Development in a Changing World*, policy brief to Parliament, October 2007

  Gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights were named as priority and one of the four areas of intensification, with an additional budget of €120 million.

- *Human Dignity for All, a Human Rights Strategy for Foreign Policy*, 2007

- *Dutch National Action Plan on Resolution 1325, Taking a Stand for Women, Peace and Security*, 2007

- *Agriculture, Rural Economic Development and Food Security in Developing Countries*, 2008

- *Choices and Opportunities, HIV/AIDS and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Foreign Policy*, 2009

- *Working together on global challenges: The Netherlands and multilateral development cooperation*, 2009

- *Cooperation, Customization and Added Value*, 2009.

3.1. Guaranteeing a structural focus on the position of women in developing countries

16. The Netherlands subscribes to the operational framework designed by the United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality[5] focusing on (a) capabilities (education, health and nutrition), (b) access to resources and opportunities and (c) security. It has adopted the seven priority areas to monitor progress in the implementation of Goal 3 and Goal 5, whereby Goal 5 has been identified as a priority area by itself.

[5] Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women, Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, United Nations Millennium Project, 2005.

3.1.1. Strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls while simultaneously meeting commitments to universal primary education[6]

17. The Netherlands spends €592 million or 12.8 per cent of its development budget on education. Special attention is given to strengthening the participation of girls in basic, secondary and tertiary education. Support is provided through sector planning, for example in the Education for All/Fast Track Initiative but also to regional non-governmental organizations such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists.

18. At the country level interventions can vary from development and implementation of a gender-responsive pedagogy model, to ensuring that specific hygiene facilities are available for girls at the school location or the availability of scholarships/bursaries for girls. Dialogue with partner Governments has enabled teenage mothers to enter or return to secondary schools (Zambia). Surveys and data systems have become gender specific, thus able to provide evidence on girls' performances in the education system.

19. One of the main constraining factors in the education of girls is the increasing violence against girls at all educational levels. Violence occurs on the way to school, but also in school by male teachers in primary, secondary and tertiary education and violence by fellow male students. The challenge to reach gender parity in education is to be found in addressing the issue of violence.

Supporting education for girls

The Netherlands supports a fund in Burkina Faso that pays for teaching materials and latrines, enabling younger girls to go to school. It has also enabled some countries to introduce scholarships for girls (Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mozambique and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and for specific target groups: single mothers (Bolivia); female victims of the conflict in northern Uganda (Uganda); 600 female pupils who are staying at home to care for parents with AIDS (South Africa). In addition to the scholarship, social workers ensure that they can continue going to school. Various forms of adult education have been set up, for example in Yemen, where there is a programme offering basic training to young unskilled women. In Zambia the Netherlands supports the national chapter of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, which is implementing a wide range of activities to keep girls at school. These activities are, for example, organizing safe housing for young girls who want to attend secondary schools that have no boarding facilities, encouraging schools to become centres of excellence by having better gender-friendly facilities, to teach a gender-friendly curriculum, by having teachers who are trained in gender responsive pedagogy. The Forum for African Women Educationalists Zambia advises the Government and particularly the Ministry of Education in aspects of mainstreaming gender.

[6] For the purpose of this report, the exact terminology of the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality has been applied.

3.1.2. Invest in infrastructure to reduce women's and girls' time burdens

20. Dutch support includes building infrastructure which will provide 50 million people with clean drinking water and 10 million people with renewable energy in several countries. Sustainable drinking water facilities require more than infrastructure alone, however. The Netherlands is emphasizing that the specific needs of women are taken into account in the design and implementation of water programmes (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Viet Nam and Suriname). In Indonesia, a group of women have succeeded in arranging for investments earmarked for road-building and irrigation to be diverted to the construction of public lavatories and wash places.

21. The Development-related Infrastructure Facility (ORIO) is a Dutch fund with a budget of €805 million in 2009-2013 for the design, implementation (construction), operation and maintenance of public infrastructure in developing countries. Gender equality is taken into account as one of the selection criteria. Gender indicators for monitoring and evaluation within the ORIO programme are being formulated.

22. Investments in clean drinking water must be accompanied by investments in energy provisions. In December 2009 DGIS, SNV and HIVOS signed the African Biogas Partnership Programme. During the period 2009-2013, a total of more than 70,000 households in six African countries (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania) will be equipped with domestic biogas installations. Experiences from HIVOS in Cambodia (3,000 biogas installations) show that the programme is having a major positive impact on women, who no longer need to spend as much time or money organizing the collection of firewood or other fuels. A major secondary benefit is the reduction of health problems associated with traditional wood-fired stoves.

3.1.3. Guarantee women's and girls' property and inheritance rights

23. The legal and policy environment generally shows that while land laws and policies are critical for the promotion of women's land rights, other relevant laws — related to inheritance, family status and domestic violence — are equally critical. In Bangladesh and in Bolivia, many women have acquired titles to land through activities supported by Dutch embassies. Obtaining rights to land strengthens women's status and gives them collateral for credit.

24. To ensure that equal rights are upheld, institutions need to have the capacity for enforcement. The Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa is doing relevant research in sub-Saharan Africa and using the findings for training and awareness-raising, advocacy, and supporting networks of women farmers. In Mexico, Uganda and India, national non-governmental organizations are implementing activities regarding property and inheritance rights. The Netherlands also supports a FAO project in Mozambique that trains judges and government officials at decentralized level in sustainable legislation and rights for women. These developments strengthen social structures and contribute to the acceptance of women's rights and their right to self-determination.

3.1.4. Eliminate gender inequality in employment

25. The Netherlands has contributed to improvements in legislation on secondary terms of employment such as maternity leave (United Republic of Tanzania,

Yemen), childcare, working hours, pensions (Yemen), safe transport (Pakistan), and training in non-traditional forms of employment in the productive and services sectors (Bolivia). It also contributes to the promotion of formal and equal employment for adolescent women through ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation). According to ITUC the pay gap between men and women worldwide may be much higher than official government figures indicate. Reasons include overt as well as subtle discrimination against women in the labour market and the workplace. Especially in the private sector, women are at a disadvantage through the system of promotions, lack of maternity protection and provisions for parental leave of men and women.

26. Priority is given to the provision of microcredit to women. Organizations such as Promoter in Bolivia, CrediMujer in Peru and MicroStart in Burkina Faso cater exclusively to women with Dutch support. The Netherlands also finances the Women's World Banking network, which now has 54 microcredit agencies and banks in 30 countries benefiting 21 million microentrepreneurs. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the size of the loans awarded to women increases their workload but is not enough to lift them out of poverty. As a result, the women are confined to small-scale activities in the informal sector and have to work harder to generate a modest increase in revenue.

3.1.5. Increase women's share of seats in national parliaments and local governmental bodies

27. Although the Beijing Platform for Action recommends that Governments allocate 30 per cent of their parliamentary seats to women, only a few partner countries have realized this objective. Over recent years, the Netherlands has invested both in supporting Governments of partner countries to achieve the goal of equal participation of men and women in decision-making, and in strengthening women's individual capacities to facilitate their participation in the political domain. Women have become more self-reliant by obtaining knowledge about the rights of women in politics, finding out how to present a political argument, and establishing networks on which they can fall back following setbacks, such as intimidation by conservative opponents.

28. Community-level participation often acts as a springboard for women's involvement in the wider political domain. This is the case in Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh, where women are represented on water management committees and parent-teacher associations. Other steps towards cultural change have been achieved through the influence of the media. In Egypt, a women's organization set up a unit to monitor violations of women's rights in the media. As a result, media employees have become far more sensitive to gender aspects, and this has led to a public debate on the participation of women in politics.

3.1.6. Combat violence against women and girls

29. The Netherlands sponsors norm-setting activities via the United Nations, such as the annual French-Netherlands resolutions on violence against women. It makes annual financial contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women, managed by UNIFEM. It contributed to the establishment of a United Nations databank with regard to violence against women, through a financial contribution to the Division for the Advancement of

Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The database, online since the beginning of 2009, gives an outline of legal provisions and best practices in more than 100 countries. It is an important source of inspiration for policymakers and lobbying groups around the world.

30. In eight partner countries for development cooperation and seven other countries, the Netherlands supports national Governments and non-governmental organizations, sometimes with other partners, in their efforts to eradicate violence against women. Activities include adoption of relevant legislation (Bangladesh, Ghana and Mozambique); reversing impunity (Guatemala, Nicaragua); supporting training programmes for law enforcement officials; strengthening civil society organizations; training media on gender-based violence; and supporting awareness-raising programmes in the private sector. In countries such as Ethiopia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Netherlands works closely with UNFPA and UNDP to prevent gender-related violence, to make it a criminal offence at the national level and to support active prosecution and victim aid. A recently composed manual on monitoring and reporting about violence against women is being used in partner countries and by the Division for the Advancement of Women.

31. In several Central American countries serious acts of violence against women, including femicide, take place. Therefore, the Netherlands supported a regional conference to facilitate and encourage cooperation between Governments and embassies, Dutch and local non-governmental organizations with the aim of eliminating violence against women. In other countries, such as Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic, the Netherlands promotes legal change and supports the construction and upkeep of safe houses.

32. Many African countries have taken successful initiatives to launch campaigns and set up special programmes to end female genital mutilation. Research showed that existing social norms are obstacles to realizing this aim. Eradication requires a coordinated intervention undertaken by a sufficient proportion of families at the same time. Through migration of African women the practice of female genital mutilation and the related context of social norms have migrated with them, literally and figuratively. The Netherlands considers female genital mutilation as a serious violation of the rights of the girl child and made the practice illegal in the 1990s. Several ministries collaborate together to end this practice. The Netherlands looks at best practices in African countries. This approach was presented during an international conference on female genital mutilation held in The Hague in November 2009. It is an example of so-called development cooperation in reverse, an element of the Netherlands new-style development cooperation policies. Recently the European Commission presented a proposal for a multidisciplinary package of actions on ending female genital mutilation which may lead to European harmonization in this field.

3.1.7. Millennium Development Goal 3 Fund: investing in equality[7]

33. The Netherlands recognizes that women themselves can be the most important agents of change and that it is therefore of the utmost importance to support civil society organizations to promote and support women's rights and opportunities. In

[7] The Millennium Development Goal 3 Fund was not recommended by the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, but was set up at the initiative of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

order to empower women and stimulate them to organize national discussions the Netherlands has established the Millennium Development Goal 3 Fund "Invest in Equality" to improve the rights and opportunities for women and girls with a total budget of €70 million for the period 2008-2011.

34. It was received with an overwhelming response: 454 applications were submitted worldwide, many of them of high quality. The available budget forced the Government to make choices: 45 activities qualified for funding. These activities focus on property and inheritance rights for women; gender equality in employment and equal opportunities in the labour market; participation and representation of women in national parliaments and political bodies; and combating violence against women. Almost all 45 activities are on track and are showing interesting results. The overwhelming response to the establishment of the Millennium Development Goal 3 Fund and the success of the activities funded underscore the unmet need for funding of non-governmental organizations in the field of gender equality and women's empowerment.

3.2. Guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights*

35. For the Netherlands, a reduction in maternal mortality as well as the availability of reproductive health for everyone is a key objective in foreign policy. The strategy for sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV/AIDS, which continues to build upon the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, was published in 2009 under the title *Choices and Opportunities*. Important components include a rights-based approach, a focus on prevention, attention to the situation of vulnerable groups and the situation of young people. The policy specifically aims at a reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity. The lack of progress in these areas is a reason for major concern.

36. Owing in part to Dutch efforts, an additional target for sexual and reproductive health and rights has been included under Millennium Development Goal 5, universal access to reproductive health by 2015. The Netherlands is rallying support among donors, non-governmental organizations and recipient countries for increased investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights. Together with UNFPA, the Netherlands organized a high-level meeting on maternal health and Millennium Development Goal 5 in October 2009. The meeting resulted in the adoption of the Addis Call to Urgent Action for Maternal Health, which includes an appeal to focus on the needs of adolescents and to prioritize investment in family planning. In order to make a serious contribution to meeting the unmet need for family planning the Dutch contribution to the Global Programme on Reproductive Health Commodity Security was increased to €30 million per year.

37. Given the fact that an estimated 15 per cent of maternal mortality is caused by unsafe abortion, the Netherlands finds it of the utmost importance to address the issue of access to safe abortion. It does so through political dialogue as well by actively supporting organizations promoting and/or providing access to safe abortion services. These include the Concept Foundation, Marie Stopes International and Ipas. Through different channels, the Netherlands contributes to the reinforcement of basic health systems, including midwifery training, integration of sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV/AIDS in service delivery and efforts to reduce the feminization of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

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* This recommendation of the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality has been singled out by the Netherlands as a separate area of concern.

3.3. Guaranteeing systematic attention to the effects of international peace missions on local women and giving thought, where necessary, to the composition of the team to be sent

38. The Netherlands invests considerably in women and peace and security. Involvement of and input by women is essential in interventions aimed at ending conflicts and increasing security, stability and human security globally. The Dutch National Action Plan 2008-2011 on resolution 1325 (2000) was adopted in December 2007. Joint investments under the Plan by Government and civil society amount to €23 million (including €15 million from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, coordinator of the Action Plan). Cooperation between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence has furthermore resulted in the incorporation of gender in the assessment framework for Dutch input in operations. Through the activities under the National Action Plan the Netherlands contributes to the participation of women in peace negotiations and demobilization programmes. In addition, special attention is given to gender dimensions in humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.

39. For short-term deployment in areas of conflict gender experts are actively recruited. That has for example led to the selection of a Dutch expert on sexual violence against women, who was seconded to the European Union police mission in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo earlier in 2010. The Netherlands has played a key role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in addressing impunity with regard to sexual violence. It supports several initiatives, including implementation of the United Nations comprehensive approach on sexual violence. Specific attention to the integration of women in reconstruction processes is encouraged in Dutch bilateral interventions in fragile States including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, the Sudan and Afghanistan. The Netherlands co-sponsored Security Council resolution 1820 (2008), condemning sexual violence as weapon of war, in June 2008. Finally, the Netherlands also co-sponsored Security Council resolutions 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009) concerning women and peace and security in October 2009.

40. In cooperation with Norway, Finland and Sweden, the Netherlands commissioned a study to review the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in Afghanistan. It resulted in concrete recommendations to NATO on how to incorporate a women's perspective on peace and security into NATO operations.

Promoting Afghan women's political participation

Collaboration between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gender Concerns International (a Dutch non-governmental organization), the Institute of Inclusive Security (a United States non-governmental organization), the United States Department of State and UNIFEM made it possible to have Afghan women participate in and address the audience of the London Conference on the future of Afghanistan. The Netherlands Government considers this a first step to ensuring that Afghan women can participate in all the political decision-making events regarding the future of their country.

3.4. Structural focus on improving the position of women in all international areas of policy

41. In 2004 and 2005 a committee established by the Government of the Netherlands reviewed progress in gender mainstreaming in various ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Appreciation was expressed for the integration of a gender perspective in development cooperation, which could act as a role model for other ministries. However, in other areas of foreign policy, the development of a gender perspective was recommended. This conclusion was also adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its concluding observations of February 2010.

42. In the meantime, the Netherlands has become very active in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. Human rights have become a priority issue for the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Women's rights figure prominently in the current human rights strategy, which applies to all areas of foreign policy. An analysis has been planned of all relevant files within the European context to assess how the Netherlands can make an effective contribution to gender equality in European Union development cooperation, trade and the European foreign and security policy. Within the European Union, the Netherlands supports the adoption and implementation of the European Union Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Affairs. It has also welcomed the establishment of the European Institute for Gender Equality.

43. The Netherlands also looks at possible ways to reinforce interaction between national and international policy. Where possible, it would like to use internationally developed indicators to monitor progress in the Netherlands. Reporting obligations under international treaties and/or conventions are used to evaluate or adjust existing policies. The importance of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as a basis for domestic policies and in the dialogue with other countries/organizations on gender equality is still indisputable.

44. The United Nations system has a crucial role to play in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. One powerful United Nations gender agency would facilitate and support this important role. The Netherlands is strongly committed to reforming the United Nations gender architecture and ensuring that the new gender organization will be operational as soon as possible. Once the entity is operational, the Netherlands will double its current core funding for the work of the United Nations in this field through the newly established organization.

4. Lessons learned and challenges ahead

4.1. Lessons learned

45. The first United Nations Women's Conference was held in Mexico City in 1975. Fifteen years after the fourth Conference, at which the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were signed, and 10 years after the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, it is clear that much has been achieved and important progress made. Nowadays, there is ample proof that the promotion of gender equality is one of the most powerful forces of change. Through gender equality the achievement of many social and economic goals of today can be

accelerated. So we can move beyond the "why" of gender equality and can focus on the "how". At the same time this has not yet resulted in real changes in policies. Goal 3 and Goal 5 still remain the Millennium Development Goals where least progress is made. In many countries policymakers are still unaware of the challenges, unsure of what to do, or neglectful of core public issues.[9] Gender mainstreaming, in vogue at the turn of the millennium, has too often resulted in gender "away streaming". So we have learned that more is needed to get to a new level and make real progress. We have concluded that goals can be met provided there is a combination of political will, leadership and commitment at the highest level, expertise, a clear policy and adequate funding. For this reason the Netherlands has identified gender equality as a core objective of government policy. We have invested in training staff to be more gender sensitive. We have asked staff and partners to formulate concrete policies and interventions, leading to tangible results. And we have made available €308 million in additional resources for the period 2008-2011. Of this amount €173 million goes to sexual and reproductive health and rights. In addition to these funds the Netherlands contributed in the period 2008-2009 almost €10 million to the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women and €2 million to UNIFEM.

46. Currently we are reviewing progress made.

4.2. Challenges ahead

47. The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is still a difficult message to sell. There are several pervasive biases in the discourse. First of all people, men and women alike, are tempted to look at gender equality as a women's issue only. This disregards the fact that this is a social issue, with wide-ranging effects for all people in society. Second, women are easily portrayed as victims only. Women continue to be regarded as a possible, but optional, target group that needs help. Somehow many people still have difficulty in seeing women as actors in their own right, as the other half of humanity, who can contribute just as much to the improvement of society as the male half. Third, there is a bias towards thinking that "gender neutral" developments, policies and interventions which aim equally at men and women exist.[10] There is no such thing. On the contrary, "gender neutral" policies tend to strengthen male dominance to the detriment of women.

48. Consequently, considerable energy is needed time and again at all levels to justify interventions designed to reach aims and objectives that were agreed upon internationally years ago. Over the last few years, several new initiatives have been taken to break through the image of "gender fatigue", to show that the future of humanity lies with the active empowerment of women and the improvement of gender equality. The challenge is to show that these are not mere words, but that real and sustainable change can come out of it.

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[9] The so-called policy of neglect, according to Jeffrey Sachs in the Millennium Project.

[10] A gender perspective is absent in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action.